



How are African-Americans and New Immigrants doing academically?

Q. As we celebrate the Black History Month, what is the state of academic achievement for African-American children and new immigrant children at this time?

A. The stats are still poor. Overall, African-American students score lower on standardized tests, graduate at lower rates and are considerably more likely to be expelled, suspended or placed in special education. If they are poor and new to the country, the gaps are even worse. If students are new immigrants who speak another language like Hispanic, African or Haitian students the ability to achieve is hindered even more. Research shows that African-American children tend to attend districts with substandard teachers, administrators and resources. Some districts resort to moving their low functioning minority students to alternative schools or special education so that their low scores will not pull down the overall scores of the district. One would think that districts would implement research based programs proven to be effective with poor minority and new immigrant students but all school districts complain about is little to no funding. Those who do research in education will often list what poor children need to succeed, what minority children need to succeed and what second language learners need to succeed academically. However, it is rare to find school districts that implement these kinds of programs. Often these three components overlap. Two recent reports, one from the Council of the Great City Schools and one from the American Institutes for Research, reveal that achievement gaps are still wide between African-American and white students. But concerted efforts in certain states and districts have shown that the historical trend doesn't have to remain the same, and the overall picture may have brightened slightly over the past decade or two, according to statistics and anecdotal observations.

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, African-American high school students are notably falling behind their white counterparts in graduation rates, dropout rates, literacy rates, and college preparedness rates. * In 2005, only 55 percent of all black students graduated from high school on time with a regular diploma, compared to 78 percent of whites. * In 2005, the on-time graduation rate for black males was 48 percent nationally; for white males it was 74 percent. * Nearly half of the nation's African American students, but only 11 percent of white

students, attend high schools in which graduation is not the norm. *In 2002, 23 percent of all black students who started public high school left it prepared for college, compared to 40 percent of whites. *On average, African American and Hispanic twelfth-grade students read at approximately the same level as white eighth graders. *About half of poor, urban ninth graders read at only the fifth- or sixth-grade level. * The National Assessment of Educational Progress reports that 88 percent of African American eighth graders read below grade level, compared to 62 percent of white eighth graders. * The twelfth-grade reading scores of African American males were significantly lower than those for men and women across every other racial and ethnic group.

A disproportionate number of failing schools, across grade levels, are predominantly comprised of poor, racial, and ethnic minority students. These segregated schools tend to have fewer financial, human, and material resources than schools in more affluent areas. By the time students who attend these schools reach high school, the academic challenges they face have been compounded by years of substandard education.

What Can Parents Do?

We could spend hours discussing the state of education for African-American children. The research is voluminous and thorough. While school boards and politicians fight over funding and teacher evaluation systems, our children lose valuable time and resources. People live where they can afford but that doesn't mean they should stand for substandard schools. Parents have to take a much more active role in their children's education. Here are my tips for parents:

1. Make sure your child has good nutrition.
2. Make sure your child has enough sleep.
3. Make sure your child does all homework, assignments and readings.
4. Read to your child and insist older children read everyday.
5. Ask 'wh' questions while you read to improve comprehension skills.
6. Turn off the TV and video games and read.
7. Take them on outings and improve vocabulary and exposure to new things.
8. Visit the library and library shows. They are free and informative.
9. Learn the curriculum for your child's grade and reinforce skills at home.
10. Watch educational TV like Discovery Channel, National Geographic and PBS!
11. Have a good relationship with your children. Emotional health is just as important as physical health.
12. Have good routines for homework, meal times and sleep.
13. Stay in touch with your child's teacher often. Ask what you can do to help.
14. Join your schools PTA. Be active and present at school.
15. Attend all meetings at your child's school.
16. Let your children know education is a priority and non-negotiable.
17. Encourage writing skills. Help them write about a book they've just read or a show they watched. Let them write letters to family on paper or online.
18. Make sure your child is in good health.
19. Have your child's vision and hearing tested.
20. If your child

is struggling academically have him/her evaluated early for a learning disability so there can be early intervention.21. Attend school board meetings and know what is happening in your district.22. Make sure your child has all school supplies needed.23. Expect much from your district and teachers.24. Ask the teacher for resources you can reinforce at home.25. Find out what your child will be learning next week so you can introduce it over the weekend.26. Get a tutor if you can. Professional tutors can be expensive but you can connect with your local high school and ask for a student who is good in math, for example, who you can pay a stipend to tutor your child. 27. If you can let your child learn to play an instrument, join a sport or join a club. Kids who are engaged in a group do better in school because they are more focused, tend to have more friends, and have better self-esteem. 28. Praise your child for his/her strengths. He may not be on the honor roll but he may be an excellent writer or debater or an excellent artist. Praise progress, improvement and good effort as if it was an A+. 29. Make sure your child attends school! It's hard to grasp something new if you were not there to learn it and practice it.30. Keep your children actively learning through the summer months. They can still have fun and read a book and do a few pages of work, too. Some information gathered from the www.all4ed.org and www.districtadministration.com websites.

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